

Name _____



Date _____

How a Bill Becomes a Law

By Phyllis Naegeli

Have you ever had an idea that you thought should become a law? Ideas for laws come in many ways. Members of Congress present ideas for new laws. Ordinary citizens may call their senator or representative with an idea. Special interest groups send delegates to talk to our nation's leaders. Even the president has ideas for laws.

In order for an idea to begin the process of becoming a law, a member of Congress must sponsor it. Once this happens, the idea becomes a bill. Bills can start their journey in either part of Congress. Let's follow a bill that begins in the House of Representatives.

Once a bill is written, it is sent to the clerk of the House. Here, it is given a special number beginning with the letters H.R. (House of Representatives). Then, the bill is printed and sent to all members of the House of Representatives. At this point, the Speaker of the House sends the bill to a committee. The committee studies the bill to decide if it is a good idea or not. They often hold hearings to listen to why a bill should be a law. After the hearings, they may make changes to a bill, send it on for a vote, or table it. (Tabling it means it will not be sent for a vote.)

Now the House Rules Committee gets the bill. They put it on a calendar for a vote. When the bill's turn comes, it goes to the floor of the House of Representatives. Here the representatives have a chance to talk about the bill, and vote to pass it or not. If a bill is passed in the House, it is sent to the Senate. In the Senate, it is again sent to a committee to be studied. It can be changed and sent for a vote, sent to the Senate floor as it is, or tabled. Once sent to the floor of the Senate, it is discussed and brought up for vote. If passed, the bill is sent to a conference committee.

A conference committee is made up of senators and representatives. This committee works out any changes made to the bill. When the committee is satisfied, the bill is sent back to each floor for a final vote of approval. Then it is printed by the government printing office and sent to be certified by the clerk of the House. From there, it goes to the Speaker of the House and the vice-president for their signatures. Finally, it is sent to the president for review.

The president has ten days to look over the bill. He then chooses to sign it into law, veto it, or do nothing. If it is signed it becomes law. If it is vetoed, it can still become a law. The Senate and the House can vote again. If two-thirds of the members of each chamber agree, the bill becomes a law. This is called an override. If the president decides to do nothing, there are two possible outcomes. If Congress is in session, the bill automatically becomes law. If Congress has adjourned during the ten-day period, the bill is vetoed by what is called a pocket veto.

It is a lengthy process for an idea to become a law. Our government has been set up so that ideas will be seriously considered before they become a law in our country. Can you think of something important that should become a law? Talk to your parents. Maybe your idea can be given to your congressional representative.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Who comes up with ideas for laws?
- A. ordinary citizens
 - B. the president
 - C. a member of Congress
 - D. a special interest group
 - E. all of the above
 - F. none of the above
- _____ 2. What are the two chambers of Congress? (Choose two)
- A. the Senate
 - B. the Supreme Court
 - C. the House of Representatives
 - D. the executive branch
- _____ 3. Which of the following events happens first?
- A. a bill is sponsored
 - B. a bill is voted on
 - C. a bill is printed and distributed
 - D. the president reviews the bill
- _____ 4. Who is on the conference committee?
- A. members of the Senate and the House of Representatives
 - B. the Supreme Court justices
 - C. the president and vice-president
 - D. special interest group leaders and citizens
- _____ 5. What is it called when the president decides against a bill?
- A. veto
 - B. approval
 - C. override
 - D. vote
6. What is a pocket veto?
- _____
- _____
7. What can a committee do with a bill?
- _____
- _____

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_____ 8. Who signs a bill before it goes to the president? (Choose all that apply)

- A. the vice-president
- B. the House Rules Committee Chairman
- C. the Speaker of the House
- D. the Secretary of State
- E. no one signs it

_____ 9. Tabling a bill means that it is placed on a table for discussion.

- A. True
- B. False

_____ 10. A bill can become law without the president's signature.

- A. True
- B. False

Do you have an idea for a law? What is it? Why do you think it should be a law? Write a proposal for this law. If your parents and/or teacher agree, send it to your congressional representative.

Name a law that you must follow every day. What does this law do? How does it affect you? Do you like this law? Why or why not?



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